

Lawrence Wilkerson: U.S. Imperial Decline & Unraveling Rule of Law

Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired Colonel in the US Army and the former Chief of Staff to the US Secretary of State. Colonel Wilkerson discusses how the rule of law collapses during the decline of the empire. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@GDiesen1> Support the research: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: <https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng> Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We have the privilege today of being joined by Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff to the U.S. Secretary of State, to discuss the direction of the Trump administration and the likely pending war with Iran. Thank you, as always, for taking the time.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Thank you for having me—and for bringing me to Norway, right?

#Glenn

Sorry?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Are you bringing me to Norway? That's the plan. I thought it looked like you were in your office, aren't you?

#Glenn

Yeah, yeah.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, okay.

#Glenn

So, well, we knew that before the election, polls showed a majority of Americans felt the U.S. was heading in the wrong direction, and many people who voted for Trump thought he would take the country in a more sensible direction. And to be honest, I thought that with Trump there was a good chance for a grand bargain between the great powers—to adjust to new realities instead of pretending the '90s were still here and watching all the consequences build up. But now we more or less see it's the same thing, just on steroids.

That is very reckless military adventurism that seems to risk everything—including, for the United States, military threats against a dozen countries just in the last week, and economic threats against almost the entire world. And while China doesn't seem to trust anything the U.S. says or offers, Russia, I think, by this point sees Trump as unreliable, and that any deal coming out of this couldn't be trusted. And of course, there's a likely pending attack on Iran in the near future, with consequences we can't really predict. With this seeming dismantling of the entire international order, how do you assess it? Because there has to be some order in the chaos. Is there a grand strategy we're missing?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

You just said it, Glenn. It's an unraveling of the entire world order that was set up after World War II. I think it's intentional—intentional from the brains of some truly stupid people. And I don't use that adjective unwisely, I don't think. Stephen Miller comes to mind immediately, making a statement yesterday, I think, that we needed bases in Greenland. Does he not know we had thirty bases in Greenland? We had thirty bases in Greenland—that's my count, and I checked it, because that's when we started closing them as we downsized the U.S. military and shut down early-warning points and Air Force squadrons, all the things we did under H. W. Bush in 1990 and '91 as the Cold War ground to a halt.

So Miller doesn't even know what he's talking about when he says we need Greenland. We effectively had Greenland. We have Thule today—one base. I think that's the only one we have, but we once, as I said, had thirty. So what's happening is they've decided the world is going to be a Hobbesian world—and I'll come back to that—atop which we will sit. And the guide is not necessarily Hobbes; the guide is Trump's morality. I mean, he said that. That's what he's going to base his decisions on the use of force on. And I suspect that applies both domestically, as we're seeing demonstrated vividly in Minnesota right now—a doubling down, tripling down on the strategic failure of what he was doing there that's now happening.

I just got a report from someone who lives there who said she'd never seen anything like it in her life. They're everywhere now, and they continue to be draconian. They keep dressing the same way, never taking their masks off. They're running their cars into the back of other people's cars and trucks in Minnesota just to make them stop in regular traffic. They ram the rear end of a truck and

then tell the person to get out. So he's doing it domestically as well as internationally. And as I just said—as he said, graphically—the guide for his decision-making in both of these worlds is his morality. We all know he has no morality. So what is the guide for this decision-making?

#Glenn

Yeah, no. Well, this is the problem. When the law disappears in the international sphere, it also tends to decline domestically—and when the empire essentially comes home. But do you see these impulses as an indication of an empire in decline? Because a lot of this seems intended to be a show of strength, that America is back. But a lot of it feels like a sign of weakness. Why go after Venezuela in this way? It's hard to see what was actually achieved by simply kidnapping a president.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

It's not exactly weakness, although I'd be the first to say I know fairly well how powerful—or not powerful—our military is today in all its aspects. But it's not exactly that so much as it is misuse. Let's just take a look at Venezuela, for example—you brought it up. Look at the array of forces we have in the Caribbean right now. That's probably close to 27 or 28 percent of our available forces for this kind of activity. Meanwhile, China is still sitting over there, and Russia is still in Europe. There are far more formidable enemies—or potential enemies. They don't have to be enemies, but they are potential ones. Military people have to take into consideration potential enemies more than Venezuela, or for that matter, anyone in the Western Hemisphere.

Certainly not Cuba. Certainly not Colombia. I can't think of anybody in the Western Hemisphere that even comes close to being a peer power, or even a near-peer power, or even a power aspiring to be a near-peer power. So why do we have all this combat power arrayed in the Gulf of America? This is absurd. It's malposition. And if we are indeed—and I fear we are—going to do something in Iran that's going to be significant, not just a little pinprick like we did with the B-2s on the nuclear sites before, then we are malpositioned to do that. We're well positioned to get our rear ends handed to us as we try to do whatever it is we try to do, because we are so maldeployed.

Not to mention the fact that every single unified command that has a territory—an area of responsibility, an AOR—which encompasses probably 60% of the globe, has a presence mission. And that presence mission requires forces, usually naval forces like Marine amphibious units, Marine amphibious ready groups, Marine expeditionary units, the bottom ships—amphibious ships to carry them—and the requisite air power, usually provided by a carrier. Well, we don't have that many carriers today, and we have a lot of presence missions because we are, as I said, in two-thirds of the freaking globe. We're not doing that. So where are those war plans? Where are those presence plans? Where are those CINC strategy—combatant commander strategy—plans?

They're not being fulfilled, apparently. So we must have assumed that, as we sit on top of this Hobbesian world, battling anyone who dares to confront us, we have the power to do it from the

homeland. We're going to launch the forces from the homeland—from Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. This is preposterous unless they're going to revamp, revise, and resettle the U. S. military all over the place, other than where it is right now, because we're malpositioned to do anything. Another strategy than the one we were executing—and I'm sorry, I haven't seen a new one confronting the realities of today. I haven't seen a new one being exercised.

What I've seen is spasmodic use of the military forces in accordance with Pete Hegseth's desires—presumably Trump's desires. That's what we're seeing. We're not seeing anything even remotely connected to a strategy, let alone a policy, except "I make the decisions based on my morality." That's the policy. And the strategy is: Pete will do it. And wherever we say do it, he'll do it—whether it's Greenland, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Iran, wherever. That's how we're operating, Glenn. We are a disaster. We are a disaster unto ourselves.

#Glenn

Well, I noticed that Pete Hegseth referred to international law as some kind of woke conspiracy—something that would constrain U.S. soldiers, who are now called warriors. And of course, he's the head not of the Department of Defense, but the Department of War. There seems to be this assumption that international law, rules, and trust-building are somehow the source of America's weakness and decline. So, by abandoning these things and putting on a show of strength, the decline can be reversed and the U.S. can once again rise to a position of power.

But as you suggested, across Latin America, a lot of countries could have very good relations with the U.S. based on trust. The problem is trying to bully many of these countries—like Venezuela—into being a sort of exclusive gas station for the United States. With that kind of threat, they'll naturally look toward other great powers for protection. I mean, this is what happened in Cuba. So it just seems so counterproductive—so many of the things being done are short-term gains for a long-term weakening position. But the main thing I want to ask you about is Iran, because the rhetoric now is that Westerners should leave Iran immediately.

There seems to be a massive inflation of the reports about losses, protests, and riots. The argument is that it's still going on, but it doesn't really appear that way. It seems to have died down a bit, yet the media here suggest it's still in full swing—that the Iranian regime is just slaughtering people in the streets. I mean, there have been losses, I'm not denying that, but the rhetoric seems to be ramping up for a war on Iran. You hear talk of anything from a few hours to days or weeks. Do you think that's actually likely now—a war on Iran?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I do. And let me go back, though, and answer some of your earlier remarks before that question. I think what we have—if we've decided to do anything that's concerted, something wrapped in a package that could be put into a national security decision memorandum, signed by the president,

and released to the bureaucracy, at least because it would be top secret—as a strategy, it's something like this: "Let's go after everything in the world we don't like with sanctions and military power until it breaks. And then, when it breaks, we'll pick up the pieces." That's kind of what I meant—we're executing a strategy that would turn the world into a very Hobbesian place, one we'd sit atop of. Well, if you're going to sit on top of that—and I'm not unfamiliar with this—

This was George Bush's strategy when he finally laid it out—his national security strategy in 2002. It essentially said this. And let me back up for a minute. I don't want to bore your listeners with all this history, but let me back up. In 1992 and '93, H. W. Bush essentially declared, in a very carefully composed and highly secret document, that we were going to continue, spread, widen, and deepen the world order. And if you wanted to put one word to that—and Bush actually said this—it was "law," both domestic and international law, and increasingly international law. People forget this, but the reason he went to the United Nations for the first war in Iraq was because he wanted the imprimatur of the United Nations.

And the reason he got out of Iraq—and was sorely criticized for it—was because that's all the mandate said. It essentially said, "Reverse the aggression." And once, as his chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, said, we had kicked Iraq's army out of Kuwait, we quit, came home, and declared the New World Order a warning. That was George H. W. Bush—a world of law, both domestically, which he would never have violated to the extent that Trump has. I mean, it would be anathema to George H. W. Bush to do what Donald Trump is doing in Minnesota, for example. It was hard enough for him to deploy troops to Los Angeles to quell the riots there in '92. Then, all of a sudden, the powers in the world got together—we call them the deep state, the oligarchs, the globalists, the neoconservatives, whatever you want.

They're not just in America. But they got together and said, "We don't like this guy. This guy is not Ronald Reagan. We don't like him." He'd been Reagan's vice president for eight years, and so they got rid of him. Israel participated. Ross Perot, with Israel's backing, participated. There was a reason that very honorable man, Jim Stockdale, who was Ross Perot's vice-presidential candidate, went on television that day and said, "What am I doing here?"—and walked off stage and left the race. He found out Israel was supporting Ross Perot. They didn't like George Bush in Israel because he'd forced them into the Oslo process. So they got rid of him. And what came after that was a series of presidents—young, inexperienced, not knowing what they were doing, certainly not knowing what they were doing in the national security world.

And I include President Obama in that. They were influenced by these people—call them neoconservatives, call them globalists, call them the deep state, pick your term. They were influenced by these people, and they're not all in the United States; they're elsewhere too. Call them the Davos crowd, if you want. At any rate, they didn't like George H. W. Bush. So we got these people influencing every president since then, and then we got Donald J. Trump. And Donald

J. Trump put a whole new patina on these people's wishes. In many cases, I think he's actually operating not necessarily in accordance with their wishes, because he's operating, as he has said, in accordance with his own wishes—period.

So now we have this combination—all to say, we now have the combination of a disaster that's been building up, made much worse by 9/11, moving toward the fulfillment of the "Clean Break" strategy in Southwest Asia, with Israel at the heart of it. Think about how we're acting today: we're acting like a big Israel. We learned from Israel—we learned a lot of this stuff from Israel. We're acting very much like a big Israel. And now we're in this mess with Donald Trump, where we don't know where we're going or how we're going to get there. But we can see the trappings of both, and they don't look very good—domestically or internationally. And here's where I'm really worried about the international implications. Russia and China are watching all of this. Russia is tied down right now, partly by what we're doing in their soft underbelly with our CIA in places like Georgia.

And they're tied down with what we're doing in Kaliningrad, in the Baltics, north of Murmansk, and so forth, in conjunction with our erstwhile allies in NATO. We are tying Russia down in more than just Ukraine. So Russia is not really equipped, for example, to fulfill its full obligations under the new defense treaty with Iran. China is watching all this—the most powerful economy in the world, in many respects the most powerful country in the world. China is certainly the richest country in the world if you just look at what they made this last year alone. And by the way, that was with our tariffs on them. They're looking at it and saying, "No, I don't want to get into this. I do not want to get into this. I'm winning. I'm winning astronomically. I'm winning beyond my wildest expectations."

I do not want to derail this train. I do not want to go into a nuclear conflict, perhaps, with the United States. I certainly don't even want to go into a conventional one, because then they'll have to use nukes on me—because I'd beat the hell out of them in a conventional war. So you don't have any checks on this stupidity of the empire, on this imbecility of the empire. Not any real solid checks, because the only two countries that could really do it are a revitalized Russia now—and Lord, have mercy, is she revitalizing—in terms of all the ingredients for doing something about it: defense industrial base, roaring economy, really, despite the lies CNN tells every day and the generals tell every day. So here we are in this world with no real peer power, and in the case of China, a superior power to check us—not even wanting to check us, wanting us to kill ourselves.

That'd be the best thing. That'd be very Confucian, very Sun Tzu-ian—kill ourselves for them. But they don't want that either, because they see it as too much turmoil for the world if the empire were to just suddenly collapse. So we're caught in this trap. We can do, to a certain extent, what we want; they have only so much patience, so we don't want to push that too far. But we can do almost anything we want to, especially in our own hemisphere. I was talking to one of my Cuban friends the other day, and I said, "Hang low. Stay low. Don't get on his radar screen. Because if you get on Steve Miller's radar screen, you get on Marco Rubio's radar screen—they're busy right now with Venezuela and everything—they'll come down there and crush you."

They'll absolutely crush you, and no one will come to your assistance. Brazil, Colombia, Mexico—no one will come to your assistance. Hell, we're threatening to go down into Mexico with armed forces. You've got to weather this. You've got to weather this. Somehow you've got to weather it until we break apart and collapse, or someone comes to the helm who has some sense. I talk to people every day across the globe about this, especially down in the Western Hemisphere. It's a disaster for them, and they're scared. They're frightened. And I don't blame them. I've said this so many times, but Ricardo Alarcón—even, you know, the speaker, or sort of the head of the Cuban National Assembly at the time—said, "Even a dying elephant can thrash a lot of grass." And we're close. We're 90 miles away. I feel sorry for Cuba right now.

Reeling under the impact of Melissa—it ravaged much of Cuba, particularly Santiago, the second-largest city. And no help from us. No help, really, from too many others either, because, you know, how are you going to get help from Venezuela? They're hard-pressed now too. And you're not going to get much help from Brazil or from Colombia. Why did Lula back out of the BRICS movement to de-dollarize? Because we scared him to death. We scared him to death. We threatened to do all kinds of things if he stayed in this movement and helped it de-dollarize. So now the BRICS movement to de-dollarize has been slowed down majorly—not that it was going to be very rapid anyway, because here's another thing.

China has said categorically, in the Central Party School and elsewhere in the Politburo, that they don't want to be the world's reserve currency. Think about that for a moment. They don't want to be the Dutch guilder, the British pound sterling, or the American dollar. They don't want any of that crap because they see what that kind of status does to an empire. It breeds exactly what we are today. It bred the British out of their empire. Eisenhower's most lethal tool in 1956, with regard to the Suez Crisis, was to threaten a run on the pound through the IMF. That got them. We're gone. We're out. So China wants nothing to do with it. But the BRICS had made some progress toward de-dollarization.

And because of that, we are making progress toward it, just matter-of-factly, because people are now trading in currencies other than dollars. They're trading in yuan, renminbi, rubles, reals, and other things. But we've made a mess of this world, Glenn. We've made a mess of it. And we had this opportunity at the end of the Cold War. I call it "condominium or chaos." We had the opportunity, and George H. W. Bush wanted to avail himself of that opportunity—to make law, and the effects of law, permanent in the world. Imperfect, to be sure. It's imperfect in our own country; it's imperfect in everyone's country. But nonetheless, to build on what we had done post-World War II, what Eisenhower left us as a legacy—and more than any other man, I think he did.

And we made the decision to do just that and embarked on that course. Then someone found out about it, got rid of him, and put a bunch of bumpkins in. And those bumpkins were influenced by everything—from the deep state to the oligarchs, to the globalists, to the neoconservatives, you name it. And that's where we are today. It produced Trump. I don't think they counted on that. I really don't think any of them, any of that grouping, counted on producing Donald Trump. But they

got him, and he may be messing up their plans—as bad for them as he is for the rest of us, I don't know. But when that happens, there's going to be a reckoning. When they feel like—the Rothschilds of the modern age—when they feel like they're threatened, Donald Trump will go.

#Glenn

Well, that's such a strange shift from the atmosphere at the beginning of the 1990s, because the argument for having this world order based on U.S. global primacy—there was a lot of attractive rhetoric around it.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Bush would never have said "global primacy." H. W. Bush—his son did. Bush thought it would be more like a condominium. We can go back, and I can show you where we talked about China. I can show you where we talked about China in the second Bush administration—the Bush two, the boy. We were not looking for anything more than economic competition with China. We weren't looking for war. We weren't looking for anything that even remotely resembled what we started talking about later with regard to Taiwan and so forth. Strategic ambiguity was fine with us.

And we had some talented diplomats dealing with China, not least of whom was Colin Powell. Remember that incident when the EP-3 and the Chinese F-8 collided in April 2001? "Emergency, emergency, emergency." That was solved within 48 hours by Powell talking to Qian Qichen, the one Chinese member of the leadership. He's dead now, but he knew more about North America than anyone else. Powell and he talked, and the crisis was solved. Move on. That wouldn't happen today. Trump would be over there pounding his teeth on Taipei's streets. It's a different world. That's my only point.

#Glenn

When I said "global primacy," I meant that a lot of the thinking was that if there's one central power—the United States—that would reduce great-power rivalry, because there wouldn't be any rivalry anymore. It would also allow the U.S. to elevate the rule of law and let countries compete through free trade. There was all this very—uh—if not ambitious, at least optimistic expectation of the world under U.S. leadership. Not dominance, but leadership as a force for good, something benign. But again, if we fast-forward to now, it's very strange. As I said, Trump now makes threats against Latin America, the Middle East, some against Europe, Russia, China—and it seems that part of the strategy for many of these countries is just, well, let's keep our heads down.

So if it gets bogged down in Latin America or the Middle East, then at least we'll stay out of it. That seems to be the best thing to hope for. But why do you think that is? You were there in the White House during that transition period in the 2000s, when some of the initial optimism from the '90s began to fade and, yeah, I guess reality began to set in with Iraq and other military adventurism. I

don't really doubt that for many politicians the intentions in the early '90s were rather benign—that it would be a kind of benign leadership, that the U.S. would facilitate competition based on open economic exchange, friendly competition, and not these militarized conflicts. So how did we go from that optimism to where we are today?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I think, as I said, and I've been doing some extensive research into this because I started it when I was teaching at William & Mary—got stopped, then picked it up again. And now I've been asked to speak in New York sometime toward the end of January. So I picked it all up again this past week and was looking at it, reviewing the papers and everything. And I think a lot of it is that there's a group of people who have always been in the United States—and I suspect there's a group like this across much of the Western world. Some of them are financiers. Some of them would fit the term "oligarch." Some of them might be in big banking, big shipping, big pharma, big real estate—all kinds of rich, wealthy people.

That's another thing that's undergirding all of this—we've truly allowed a vicious maldistribution of wealth to develop in the West. I mean, it is vicious. It's going to eat our lunch if nothing else does. And those people had always been in the woodwork, as it were. But they were always kept in check by people like Richard Milhous Nixon, Jimmy Carter, H. W. Bush, and even, I'll say it, Ronald Reagan—who, toward the end of his second term, was a different individual than when he came to the White House. And Powell was his national security advisor at that time, both deputy and national, so two years of the last four years. These people understood that pure Thucydidean, Athenian–Melos dialogue—"I can kill you because I have the power, and you are going to die because you don't have the power"—was not the right philosophy.

It was not the philosophy that was born in the aftermath of World War II. And World War II had shown us what that kind of philosophy could do to you. So we needed to continue that, and the only way to continue it was through healthy competition. We called it "strategic competition." Let's look at just one example. When we worked to get China admitted to the World Trade Organization, these people objected vehemently in our own country. I'm sure there were people overseas objecting too—I didn't see it through the diplomacy Powell was conducting, but nonetheless, I'm sure there were. They didn't want China in the WTO. They fought us tooth and nail. It was a close-run thing.

We didn't think we were going to achieve it within that term—but we did. Now, look what happened to that. We let China become a member of the World Trade Organization and, at the same time, let our own industry—particularly our manufacturing base—atrophy even further, to the point where it was, you know, not even really a shadow of its former self, which, you may recall, had 50 percent of the world's GDP in 1945. So that was our fault, not China's fault. So then what happens? Everybody turns around and joins the crowd that's against China being a member of the WTO. Too late—they

already are. Because now they accuse China of doing the kind of things we were doing when we were able to do them in the WTO: bending people's arms behind their backs, cheating, not following the rules, and everything else.

Well, China did a little bit of that too. That's what happens when you become as powerful as China is. And we fell back and said, "Oh my God." And now look—we're on a war footing with China. I mean, that's the only way to describe it. We are on a war footing with China. That's our real enemy in the world. And even though Donald Trump looks like he doesn't want anything to do with that—and that might be one of the few sane moments he's had in his life—that's where we're headed. I agree with Mearsheimer on this. I hate to say it, but I agree with him that we're headed for war with China. We're going to war with China, maybe before I die. So that's how this metamorphosis took place. That's just one example.

Everybody who was on board for the condominium of a multipolar world—in that condominium led by Russia, Japan, China, the United States, Brazil, and India—is now against it. And they're fighting, trying to carve out their own little pieces where they can, and their own alliances where they can, tacit or real, because they see that the major power in the world—a few years ago, anyway—has gone berserk. Gone berserk and has no leadership. It has a leader who says things like, "My decisions on the use of force—that is to say, my national security decision-making—are based on my morality." Well, you have no morality, and the world knows it. So what the hell are you saying it's based on? Steve Witkoff's evaluation in terms of money? That's a hell of a way to try to run the world, but that's what we're trying to do.

#Glenn

Well, how do you explain the changes in Europe, though? Because we often focus on the United States. And of course, you had a front-row seat at the White House. But Europe has also changed profoundly. I certainly don't recognize this continent anymore. I just saw a few hours ago that Jeffrey Sachs was making some rather derogatory comments about the leaders on this continent—and he's 100% correct. All the great leaders of Europe are gone. He basically mocks Europe now. Like, who do you have? Von der Leyen, Kallas. I mean, it's just a horror show of terrible leaders making terrible decisions. The great leaders of the past—they're all gone.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

This is no comfort at all, but in 1989 at Fort McPherson, when I first joined Colin Powell, he gave me a lecture on this and told me—indubitably—that this was going to happen.

#Glenn

That Europe would end up with terrible leaders?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Yeah, he'd just come back. You may recall his job before he was called back by Reagan was as Fifth Corps commander in the Fulda Gap, where the Group of Soviet Forces Germany was going to pour through. He only spent six months over there, but Powell never spent six months anywhere without going to school—and he went to school on what was happening in Europe. So he comes back, and he's the deputy national security advisor, then the national security advisor. Then he leaves and becomes Forces Command commander. I joined him in April 1989, and within a week in his office he's telling me it's going to happen. Europe—he didn't have much faith that NATO would last, because he said, "Mitterrand, Major, Thatcher, Kohl."

They're all gone. You know what's going to replace them, Larry? People who have no conscience, people who have no sense of reality, people who haven't been seasoned by warfare that killed a hundred million people. People who think they control their lives but don't. People who think they have a political process that works, but it doesn't. He went through all this stuff, and at the end of it, I'm a fresh-caught lieutenant colonel—I don't know what to say. I have no idea what he's talking about, really. Then I got to thinking about it later, and we came back and had subsequent conversations, and he convinced me he was right.

That was at the same time we had people like Bob Gates—yes, the chancellor of my university now, the guy who wrote **Duty**, the great secretary of defense—calling him on the phone and telling him to shut up. That he had to stop, that the bear would be back, that the Soviet Union was not going away. This is 1989. The Soviet Union is not going away. "You should shut up. You're a four-star general. You have no business out there saying things like, 'What does the preacher do when the devil dies?'" That was his standard line at the time. And he would then say, when people looked at him and asked, "What's he talking about? What does the preacher do when the devil dies?"—he was talking about the Soviet Union being gone, and we're the preacher. I mean, the guy was prescient in many respects, and he predicted Europe would fall apart.

#Glenn

George Kennan wrote something similar around 1987—that if the Soviet Union were to sink into the sea, the shock would be too great for American society, because it was all built around this military confrontation. Not just domestically, in the economy, but also in the alliance systems of NATO. Everything had relied on having this external threat. So, unless one was willing to make massive reforms afterward—give up the alliance system that is NATO or the military-industrial complex—one would have to find a new enemy rather quickly, or some other international disaster.

But I don't want to leave that topic yet on Colin Powell, because this is rather fascinating. I didn't know he made this prediction about the fall of Europe in this sense. But can you flesh it out? Why—what is wrong with the leadership? How could you see that the leaders would be as terrible as they are today? Because twenty years ago, we still had something of quality here, but it's nothing like

what we see now. I mean, the Merkels and Macrons, the Starmers, the von der Leyens, I mean, Kaja Kallas is the foreign policy chief of the EU. It's just a bizarre reality we're living in. But how could he predict this? That's my question.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, I think a lot of it was... The very first sentence of his book **My American Journey**—we went over that for quite some time. And Joe Persico, his co-writer, can tell you about it. I thought it was brilliant. "I usually trust my instincts." That's how he started that book. Now, his instincts regarding Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction turned out to be a real problem for him—no one's perfect. But his instincts were that once the pressure was off, once that shibboleth of "keep Russia out, the Germans down, and the U.S. in" was no longer there, then there would be no rationale for NATO. And once NATO started falling apart, that would be a political as well as a military debacle. The political aspect of it, he said, would be aided and abetted by people who, as he put it—and this was really a graphic way to put it—had no cognizance of the war.

They weren't—he put it this way—they didn't have their feet in the war, like François Mitterrand and Kohl and others. They were eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve years old or so. None of these people have ever seen what Europe was like when it wasn't like it is today. That was his point. And he said the center can't hold in that kind of situation. That's one reason why we started immediately trying to get the Europeans to develop a 3,000-person brigade—with equipment, training, and everything about it—divorced from NATO, that would be a separate European Security Identity, ESI. They would manage it, and it would be used for whatever they wanted to use it for within the domain of Europe. Think of the Balkans, for example.

And it would not detract from NATO, nor would it be in any way a part of NATO. Insignificant—a 3,000-man brigade? I mean, insignificant. The Germans couldn't even put that together today. But it would grow. It would grow over time. It would become a division, then maybe it would become a corps—old lingo, you know, the old-fashioned terms for the army or the military. And it would have its aircraft, and it would have its industrial base and all that. And slowly but surely, maybe over a 25-year period, NATO would go away and Europe would assume its own security identity. It would be effective, well-trained, well-supplied by their own arms manufacturers, and so forth. Ah, guess what Lockheed Martin and others were saying when Powell would talk to them offline about these kinds of things.

Woo! Dangerous man! Dangerous man! We need to get rid of him, you know, because he was talking about the same thing Eisenhower talked about in '52 or '53, I guess it was, when he spoke to the Association of American Newspaper Editors and said, "This is humanity hanging from a cross of iron—this God-blessed Cold War." We wanted to get off of that, and we wanted Europe off of it too. But as he put it, there's a base force you cannot go below, because you cannot be disarmed. You cannot demobilize. Europe, you cannot demobilize. We cannot demobilize. But we can build this base force for both of us—go down to it, we'll have ours, thank you very much, and you'll have yours.

And oh, by the way, we don't want any more nuclear weapons in the world, so we'll give you our nuclear umbrella. We'll protect you. We'll keep Article 5 if you want to, with regard to nuclear weapons. We can work that out. All of this went away with Bill Clinton—every bit of it went away with Bill Clinton. It didn't go away with his second Secretary of Defense, Bill Perry. Bill Perry was going to Moscow all the time, trying to resurrect it, trying to get it going again, and trying to get Russia to be a part of it. Didn't work. Bill left. But Bill—the Bill—didn't laugh. The Bill who, with his wife, just refused to testify before Congress.

They're not worried about anything to do with the law. They're worried about their own reputations, because Bill is heavily involved in the Epstein affair—which, by the way, isn't even remotely where it should be right now. Bondi, Trump—they're not even complying with what Congress ordered them to do, minimally. This Republican-dominated Congress didn't order them to do a whole lot, but they did order them to do something, and they haven't done a thing. There are hundreds of thousands of files that haven't been revealed, and Bill Clinton is right there. Guarantee you. Guarantee you.

#Glenn

On this failure of Europe—is that why it's so addicted to the war in Ukraine? That if the war ends, especially on favorable terms, Europe can't really survive it? I'm sorry, this is the first time I've heard about that prediction by Colin Powell. Yeah.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Well, there wouldn't have been any Ukraine if we'd gone along with what we were doing. There wouldn't have been any Ukraine. I remember the conversations we had with the Russians, essentially about nuclear weapons and Ukraine giving up their nuclear weapons, as other SSRs did. And during those conversations, we talked about the European security identity and how it might merge with the Russian idea.

And we might bring Russia, for the first time, into a real, effective security arrangement—within the continental area they existed in, called Europe. I mean, from the Urals to the west, anyway, that's Europe. And that was a big part of it. Bush—well, the president—fell off that a little bit when he heard, I don't know if it was Kohl or Mitterrand or someone, but I remember one of the foreign ministers from one of the European countries had a different idea about the pace at which Russia might come in—first to the political organization as an observer, then as a member, and then to the military organization, perhaps in the same sequence.

So Russia would actually be a part of NATO. But we were having, you know, kind of domino-fitting problems—how do you separate NATO from the ESI, the ESI from NATO, and at the same time

incorporate Russia? Do you bring Russia into the ESI or into NATO? And I don't think we—truth be told, I don't think we ever solved that argument. I think we were chicken. We were going to leave it up to the Europeans. Yes.

#Glenn

Well, it's a good time to rethink some of the decisions of the '90s, as the post–Cold War world order is falling apart—especially for the Europeans—because there were some paths we could have taken. I think the Europeans paid a heavy price, because we wanted to make sure the United States had a massive footprint in Europe as a way of keeping the continent more stable and functioning as a pacifier. The price for having America on the continent was essentially preserving a lot of the Cold War infrastructure in NATO, which meant, unfortunately, making an enemy out of Russia. But as the US now wants to leave Europe, it looks as if we can reopen some of those old options we had.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Look at how fast we went down, though. I mean, we really did go down fast. At one point, I remember having a meeting with Powell, and he was like, you know, should we stop this? Should we slow this down a little bit? Because we were drawing the forces down in Europe pretty rapidly. Then, of course, we left, and it became a situation where, no, we don't want to build the forces back up. What we want to do is keep places like Ramstein, which are absolutely essential for things like fighting China and other places in the world—like Iran and the Southwest Asia problem altogether, the Levant, I should say. And so we looked at out-of-area operations as a way to keep the alliance viable.

The Balkans turned into a real mess when Powell went in and told Bush it would take half a million men, ten years, and lots of casualties to really stabilize the region. Bush said, "I don't want anything to do with that," and got accused of not paying any attention to the Balkans. So what does Clinton do when he comes in? He goes over there and bombs Serbia for seventy-eight days, making Russia even madder. You can't make this stuff up. It was such a divergence from the original conception. And I'm not for a moment saying that everything we wanted to do could have been achieved, had we just been left alone to do it—because you still would've had the Europeans, and you still would've had people coming into leadership positions in Europe who weren't steeped in the old days.

You still would have had the normal cantankerousness of countries like France, Germany, and Britain. And there's no way you could say it would have been a better world, except to say that the approach, in and of itself—an approach I would sum up in one word—law. International law and individual nations' domestic law, and adherence to that law as much as humans can manage. And configuring everything we were doing based on that law—very importantly, based on international law. The court had to be given good feet; it had to be given more than just some token figure from Africa to digest everything. It had to be given somebody who was, you know, not Black and not African.

All kinds of conversations went on about how we would make the law more a component of world affairs and, more or less, transport what we had said—"men aren't angels, there would be no laws or governments"—into the global sphere. And to prevent things like what came down the road later, like Rwanda and Sudan. We had lots of conversations when he became Secretary of State, too, looking back on the past and saying, "Boy, I wish we'd done that." Especially when we were working with Sudan to declare genocide in the South—and we did declare it. We got Bush to sign off on it. And what did it do? Nothing. So you can have the law on your side and not achieve much, but it's better to have it on your side, I think. And we're discarding it now. Back to the topic—we are totally discarding the law now. The law is what Trump says it is, based on his morality.

#Glenn

Well, on that sad note, thank you for taking the time and letting me pick your brain. You should've written my book. What?

#Lawrence Wilkerson

I should've written my book.

#Glenn

It's very—yeah.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Actually, I did write it—I burned it.

#Glenn

Well, you should publish it.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Too painful. Too painful.

#Glenn

Yeah, a lot of opportunities wasted. But again, thank you very much for your time.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Certainly. Thank you for having me. How's the weather in Norway?

#Glenn

Awful.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Awful? Thank you.

#Glenn

No, not great. Cold.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Getting ready to go that way here.

#Glenn

Yeah? Yeah. I'm seriously thinking about going back to Australia this weekend. Too cold for me.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Don't go to Bondi Beach.

#Glenn

Oh God.

#Lawrence Wilkerson

Thanks.